

**Component Area Assessment Annual Report
Oral Communication Component Area
2016-2017 Academic Year**

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Assessment Criteria

Component Area Goals

After completing the oral communication general education experience, students will be able to:

1. **Recognize communication as a transactional process by:**
 - a. determining audience orientation toward a message
 - b. identifying the supporting material most relevant to the intended receivers
 - c. recognizing and adjusting to nonverbal feedback
2. **Demonstrate critical thinking in both the production and evaluation of spoken messages by:**
 - a. identifying reasoning that links observations to conclusions
 - b. understanding the limitations of different types of evidence
 - c. differentiating between various types of supporting evidence
 - d. identifying weaknesses in reasoning
3. **Produce organized informative and persuasive messages by:**
 - a. demonstrating the ability to capture audience attention
 - b. stating a thesis and previewing oral remarks
 - c. using signposts and transitions to clarify the organization of a message
 - d. concluding with a summary of main ideas or arguments
4. **Demonstrate effective extemporaneous speaking skills by:**
 - a. maintaining eye contact with intended receivers
 - b. using gestures which complement the verbal message
 - c. using varied vocal cues in the oral delivery of a message

Learning Outcomes

Outcome 1: *Recognizing communication as a transactional process by a) determining audience orientation toward a message; b) identifying the supporting material most relevant to the intended receivers; and c) recognizing and adjusting to nonverbal feedback.*

This outcome is practiced through students' preparation outlines and speech proposals, in which they describe their preparation activities. They discuss their audience analysis activities and relate that analysis to the selection of organizational patterns, arguments, and supporting material. The assessment criteria for examining sample speeches focuses on audience adaptation as a basis for determining the competency of the speaker. All eight assessment criteria are used as a basis for determining the competency of the speaker on this outcome.

Outcome 2: *Demonstrating critical thinking in both the production and evaluation of spoken messages by a) identifying reasoning that links observations to conclusions; b) understanding the limitations of different types of evidence; c) differentiating between various types of supporting evidence; d) identifying weaknesses in reasoning.*

The focus on critical thinking in the course is reflected in all assignments, especially the preparation outlines, speeches, and self-analysis assignments. The assessment criteria for examining sample speeches focuses the following criteria as a basis for determining the competency of the speaker: choosing and narrowing a topic appropriately for audience and occasion; communicating the thesis/specific purpose in a manner appropriate for the audience and occasion; providing appropriate supporting material based on the audience and occasion; and, using language that is appropriate to the audience and occasion.

Outcome 3: Producing organized informative and persuasive messages by a) demonstrating the ability to capture audience attention; b) stating a thesis and previewing oral remarks; c) using signposts and transitions to clarify the organization of a message; d) concluding with a summary of main ideas or arguments.

This outcome is practiced through students' preparation outlines and speech proposals, in which they describe their preparation activities. Most importantly, students learn how to use different organizational patterns for various types of speeches in the course. The structural elements of persuasive speaking are evident in speech performances. The assessment criteria for examining sample speeches focuses on the following criteria as a basis for determining the competency of the speaker: communicating the thesis/specific purpose in a manner appropriate for the audience and occasion; and, using an organizational pattern appropriate to the audience and occasion.

Outcome 4: Demonstrating effective extemporaneous speaking skills by a) maintaining eye contact with intended receivers; b) using gestures which complement the verbal message; c) using varied vocal cues in the oral delivery of a message.

The development of extemporaneous speaking skills is one of the most important goals of this course. Students' competency in maintaining eye contact, using gestures, and employing vocal variety are directly observable in their speech performances. The assessment criteria for examining sample speeches focuses the following criteria as a basis for determining the competency of the speaker: using vocal variety in rate, pitch, and intensity to heighten and maintain interest; using pronunciation, grammar, and articulation appropriate to the audience; and using physical behaviors to support the message.

Method

Sample

For the fall and spring semesters, a total of 692 viewable persuasive speech videos were loaded to the Ensemble system. A priori power analysis and pragmatic time constraints resulted in a selected sample of 250 speech videos ($\pm 5\%$, 95% CI) for analysis. Systematic sampling with a random starting point for the selection of speech videos was used, wherein the team selected every third speech video after an arbitrary starting point. When the video was inaudible or corrupted, the team simply shifted to the next video and resumed with the pattern of selecting every third video. With this sampling method, we sampled more heavily from fall because more sections were offered and more videos were uploaded ($n = 160$) than in spring ($n = 90$). We attempted to ensure that all uploaded course sections had a minimum of three speech videos sampled.

Procedure

The assessment team consisted of the basic course director and a long-time term instructor. Together, the team has over 25 years of experience teaching oral communication courses. The team was created with a desire to have rigorous perspectives represented within the assessment process. The team met during June, July, and August of 2017 to conduct the assessment. The first session focused on training. The team reviewed the instrument, discussed definitions and criteria, and practiced assessing speeches. The team then coded a separate sample and attained 95% agreement on the ratings detailed below.

Although the team sat together for the assessment process, each of the videos was evaluated individually. When unsure of how to assess an element of a speech, team members would have a brief discussion and reach consensus. The totals for each team member were loaded into Excel; the results of individual assessments were not significantly different. A score for each facet and the overall speech was then averaged and tabulated into a group score. Averaged scores are reported below.

Measures

The National Communication Association's "Competent Speaker Speech Evaluation Form" was used as the assessment tool. This form operationalizes eight criteria of effective speaking competencies. The eight criteria call on speakers to: 1) choose and narrow topic appropriately for the audience & occasion; 2) communicate the thesis/specific purpose in a manner appropriate for the audience and occasion; 3) provide appropriate supporting material based on the audience and occasion; 4) use an organizational pattern appropriate to the audience and occasion; 5) use language that is appropriate to the audience and occasion; 6) use vocal variety in rate, pitch, and intensity, to heighten and maintain interest; 7) use pronunciation, grammar, and articulation appropriate to the audience, and 8) use physical behaviors that support the verbal message.

The eight criteria were rated as unsatisfactory (1) or satisfactory (2). During the training meeting, the team discussed the assessment instrument and normed on definitions of unsatisfactory and

satisfactory. It was agreed that unsatisfactory translated to a speech that would earn a D or F on the facet being assessed. A satisfactory mark translated to an A, B, or C grade on that facet.

Results

Across the two raters, an average for each of the eight elements was calculated for each speech. An overall averaged total score for each speech across the two raters was also calculated. These scores were then analyzed in terms of the student learning outcomes associated with this course.

Eight Assessment Criteria

The eight criteria were rated as unsatisfactory (1) or satisfactory (2). Average ratings across the two coders were calculated. Pronunciation, grammar, and articulation ($M=1.96$, $SD= .20$), vocal variety, pitch, and intensity ($M= 1.88$, $SD= .33$), and topic selection ($M= 1.87$, $SD= .33$) were the three highest rated criteria. Use of language appropriate to the audience and occasion ($M= 1.85$, $SD= .36$), providing appropriate supporting material ($M= 1.75$, $SD= .47$), and physical behaviors that support the verbal message ($M= 1.71$, $SD= .45$) were all also satisfactory in the aggregate. The criteria with the lowest average ratings were: communicates a thesis/specific purpose in a manner appropriate for the audience and occasion ($M= 1.61$, $SD= .49$) and organizational pattern appropriate to the audience and occasion ($M= 1.57$, $SD= .50$).

Overall Ratings for Speeches

An overall summated rating for each speech was calculated based on scores for the eight criteria. The score given by each rater was then averaged. Scores could range between 8.00 and 16.00. An established minimum score of 11.50/16.00 (71%) on the eight criteria was determined as minimally competent. The average summated ratings in the sample ranged from 8.00 to 16.00, with an average summated score of 14.12 ($SD= 1.55$). Overall, 237 of the 250 speeches sampled scored 11.50 or higher. This translates to 94.80% of the speeches passing the minimum benchmark.

Assessment of Learning Objectives

Recognize public speaking as transactional. Criteria detailed in the “Competent Speaker Speech Evaluation Form” were used to evaluate benchmarks on student learning outcomes. The first learning outcome for students is to recognize public speaking as a transactional process. This course outcome has been assessed with the average score on all the criteria. The expectation is a minimum benchmark score above 11.50 (71%). The speeches averaged better than the minimal expectation ($M= 14.12$, $SD= 1.55$). Overall 237/250 speeches scored above 11.50, which means approximately 94.80% of speeches met this course outcome.

Demonstrate critical thinking. The second learning outcome is to demonstrate critical thinking in both the production and evaluation of spoken messages. This course outcome had been assessed with the average score on critical thinking exam questions. The decision was made two years ago to eliminate exams. Therefore, the critical thinking outcome is now assessed on the following criteria from the speech assessment tool: chooses and narrows a topic appropriately for audience and occasion; communicates the thesis/specific purpose in a manner appropriate for the audience and occasion; provides appropriate supporting material based on the audience and occasion; and, uses language that is appropriate to the audience and occasion. The minimum benchmark is a

score of 6.00/8.00 (75%). The average summated score for this year's sample was 7.01 (SD= 1.11). Overall, 211 of the 250 speeches scored at or above 6.00. This translates to approximately 84% of the speeches passing this benchmark.

Produce organized messages. The third learning outcome is to produce organized and informative persuasive messages. This course outcome was assessed with the average score on the following criteria: communicates the thesis/specific purpose in a manner appropriate for the audience and occasion and uses an organizational pattern appropriate to the audience and occasion. The minimum benchmark is a score of 3.00/4.00 (75%). The average summated score for this year's sample was 3.17 (SD= .78). Overall, 165 of the 250 speeches sampled scored over 3.00 on these two criteria. This translates to only 66% of the speeches passing this benchmark.

Demonstrate effective extemporaneous speaking skills. The fourth learning outcome is to demonstrate effective extemporaneous speaking skills. The outcome has been assessed with the average score on the following criteria: uses vocal variety in rate, pitch, and intensity to heighten and maintain interest; uses pronunciation, grammar, and articulation appropriate to the audience; and, uses physical behaviors to support the message. The expectation is a minimum benchmark score of 4.50 (75%). Scores can range from 3.00 to 6.00. This year's speeches averaged a score significantly better than the benchmark ($M= 5.55$, $SD= .56$). Overall, 245 of 250 speeches sampled scored over 4.50 on these three criteria. This translates to approximately 98% of the speeches passing this benchmark.

BOT Initiative 2. The assessment procedures described in this report are consistent with BOT Initiative 2. In particular, a randomly selected sample of student work in the oral communication component of the general education curriculum is reviewed to determine the level of competency in both oral communication and critical thinking. This year approximately 94% of student speeches reviewed met the minimum standard for competency in the course, and 6% failed to meet the minimum standard.

Discussion

Assessment is the *sine qua non* of effectively administering a general education course. With 30+ sections across a semester being taught by 20+ instructors of varying expertise level, the efficacy of *CMM 103: Fundamentals of Speech Communication* could be called into question. Aggregating and examining data ensures we are delivering the course in a consistent and effective manner. Moreover, it would be impossible to identify what is working well in the course and what needs improvement without conducting frequent and rigorous assessment.

Last year's assessment demonstrated that the course was overall meeting the baseline goals for the oral communication requirement. The revision of major assignments and the increase in instructor training were maintained. The same standards for assessment established last year were continued this past academic year. The assessment team was rigorous in their assessment of the persuasive speeches. Conservative estimations for hitting the desired benchmarks and identifying areas of needed improvement were genuinely preferred.

Results of this year's assessment demonstrate that all criteria for assessing the speeches were satisfactory. Students were, on average, able to: choose and narrow topic appropriately for the audience & occasion; communicate the thesis/specific purpose in a manner appropriate for the audience and occasion; provide appropriate supporting material based on the audience and occasion; use an organizational pattern appropriate to the audience and occasion; use language that is appropriate to the audience and occasion; use vocal variety in rate, pitch, and intensity to heighten and maintain interest; use pronunciation, grammar, and articulation appropriate to the audience, and use physical behaviors that support the verbal message.

Last year's assessment highlighted some areas for improvement, especially in extemporaneous delivery. Steps were taken over the past year to incorporate more delivery-focused classroom instruction and more training for instructors on how to teach delivery skills. Moreover, students were required to use only notecards when presenting their speeches. The overall improved scores on delivery demonstrate that these efforts had some effect; however, they seem to come at the consequence of lowered scores in organizational patterns. Upon reflection, this seems like a natural consequence—students have fewer delivery notes and therefore have to rely more on memory and preparation to present an organized speech.

In Fall 2016, the course adopted a new textbook and online platform. All sections now use *Public Speaking: The Evolving Art* by Stephanie Coopman and James Lull. This textbook was chosen after an extensive review of public speaking textbooks for its balance of traditional public speaking instruction and innovative variations on core themes of oral communication. The textbook is arguably accessible and appropriate for our student body, as many of our students did not have public speaking instruction as part of their secondary education. It also costs significantly less than our previous textbook. For the 2016-2017 academic year, the textbook was accompanied by Cengage's Mindtap online platform. After one year of use, we decided that the online platform that accompanies the textbook was not worth the cost to students. It had a variety of technical issues and did not add significant value to the course. We will continue to use the textbook and have created a new addition of a hard copy workbook we believe will add more

value to the course. We believe the change in textbook directly influenced this year's assessment scores in a myriad of ways.

Topic selection, a major issue in previous years, was the highest scoring dimension this year. A change was made in the course two years ago that required student to select civic persuasive speech topics. Choosing topics of social importance helped make the topics appropriate for the audience and promote civic thinking in the course. Instructors were also asked to help students narrow topics appropriately and this work was evident in the speeches given by students in this sample. Instructors had a really clear idea this year of how to direct students in topic selection and that was likely the most significant contributor to this improvement.

The appropriateness of information is often influenced by topic selection. Therefore, appropriate topic selection improves the quality of information provided in the speech. Additionally, the requirement of five oral citations in the persuasive speech has helped increase the quality of the information provided. Although it was one of the most difficult concepts for students to grasp in the course and requires a significant amount of course instruction time, the inclusion of oral citations from high-credibility sources significantly improves the quality of the speeches. That said, there is still plenty of room for improvement on this dimension.

Verbal dimensions associated with delivery were all satisfactory. Topic selection likely influenced the formality of language used in positive ways. For the second year, argumentative tone was added to the persuasive speech rubric and stressed in class sessions. This inclusion seemingly increased vocal variety, pitch, and intensity ratings from previous assessments.

Physical behaviors that support the verbal message were also satisfactory in the aggregate; there is, however, plenty of room for improvement. Not all instructors followed the guideline to have students use notecards when presenting. There was again a noticeable difference in delivery between students who use presentation outlines and students who present with notecards, such that the notecard users engage more with the audience; they were more likely to make eye contact and use gestures during their speech.

Communicating a thesis/specific purpose was again a lower-rated criterion. Although technically satisfactory, the assessment team was not pleased with the many of the thesis statements presented in the persuasive speeches. Additional guidelines had been created for the persuasive speech assignment that asked students to argue a question of policy. These guidelines noted that the thesis statement associated with a question of policy should be framed as "Who should do what." In looking at the assessment data by instructor, a clear pattern emerged. Almost all of the speeches evaluated from sections with graduate student instructors were framed as questions of policy with clear thesis statements. The majority of speeches taught by term faculty and adjuncts were not framed as questions of policy and did not follow the guidelines. There was arguably an issue with how these changes were communicated to term and adjunct instructors. Steps to remedy this situation are discussed in the Action Plan.

The lowest rated criterion this year was the organizational pattern. It is nearly impossible to untangle the effects of an inappropriate thesis on the effects of the organization of a speech because they are inherently tied together. A poor thesis, or no thesis, does not set the roadmap for

the organization of this speech. After having too many informative speeches about problems last year from a strict problem-solution outline template, changes were made to the template to incorporate more flexibility for argumentation. Those changes ended last year's problem of confusing problem-solution organization as informational, but did not facilitate better organization of the speech. We also believe the lower organizational score reflects the switch to note cards for presentations. This issue is further addressed in the Action Plan below.

Overall, the majority of the speeches (94.8%) met the minimum benchmark score. This represents a 2% increase in speeches meeting the benchmark from the previous year.

These criteria were used to assess successful completion of the learning outcomes. In this sample, approximately 94% of the students met the first learning objective of recognizing public speaking as a transactional process. Overall, 84% percent demonstrated critical thinking in both the production and evaluation of spoken messages. About 66% of students were able to meet learning objective three by producing organized persuasive messages. Finally, 98% percent of students met the minimum benchmark for demonstrating extemporaneous speaking skills.

Action Plan

We will continue with a few major elements in the course after two years of positive assessment results. First, we will continue our practice of not including in-class examinations after seeing significantly better results in our assessment data. Online reading quizzes will serve as a way to ensure that students are prepared for class time that can then be focused on experiential learning activities.

We will also continue using the same textbook. Student feedback indicates that the textbook is clear and provides helpful information for students while they are strategically planning their speeches. The basic course director is also going to continue building a variety of supplemental resources for instructors. An instructor section was created on Blackboard two years ago. This instructor space creates an opportunity to share information like lesson plans, video examples, and activities. We are creating a repository for best practices and central mechanism for information dissemination. The instructor organizational course site will continue to grow and offer more resources for instructors.

When the decision to discontinue use of the online platform was made, we worked to significantly revise and expand a hard-copy workbook for the course. The new edition of the workbook contains significantly more class activities and supplemental instruction than previous versions. The activities in the workbook are going to help us target some of our weakest areas in assessment. All students are required to use the workbook in the 2017-2018 academic year.

Below planned steps to improve our ability to exceed assessment criteria and accomplish learning outcomes are detailed.

To help students determine more appropriate and narrow topics for speeches (Criterion 1), the course now features a civic thinking component. Students are asked to find civic problems of interest as a persuasive speech topic. The civic focus has worked well for us and we will

continue that practice. The basic course director will work diligent with course instructors to ensure that they have a clear understanding of what qualifies as a civic topic and reasons why they should require civic topic selection.

To improve the quality of thesis statements (Criterion 2), a variety of approaches will be taken. Additional supplementary materials on crafting thesis statements will now be included. Specifically, we will continue to be incredibly explicit about the use of the “Who should do what” argumentative format of a question of policy persuasive thesis. An hour of training was included on this topic at the instructor semester kickoff meeting and additional trainings for instructors will be held in October before the persuasive speech unit begins. The syllabus template also now dedicates one class period to discussing each student’s thesis statement as a question of policy in class.

To improve the quality of supporting material (Criterion 3), we will make some additions to last year’s curriculum. We will continue to require five oral citations from high quality sources. Students practice creating these oral citations with a proposal and then place them in the speech by crafting a preparation outline. We will also continue to work with our research librarian, Sabrina Thomas, to further develop the new research guide for CMM 103, which provides guidance for finding sources and information literacy. Ms. Thomas created three lesson plans on information literacy for us to include in our semester coursework. We will seek to provide more examples for students and encourage students to seek out assistance with their oral citations from the Writing Center and instructors.

To improve the organization of speeches (Criterion 4), we have to look at the multiple antecedents of this issue. Students use an outline template to create their preparation outlines and are given ample feedback by instructors. They complete class exercises that ask them to unscramble outlines and generate keyword outlines using different types of organizational patterns. We suspect that the organizational issues are likely more rooted in the change from using a presentation outline to using a limited number of notecards. Whereas students previously were allowed to take up significantly more notes with them to present, we are only allowing minimal notes to increase extemporaneous delivery skills. Therefore, the organizational issues associated in the speech presentations may be a function of a lack of preparation by students. They are not practicing enough to “know” the organization of their speeches. The assessment team’s informal notes continuously remarked that students did not seem prepared and sometimes even seemed surprised by the contents on their notecards. To address this issue, we are going to have instructors stress the importance of distributive practice. Whereas students do not need to memorize their entire speech, they do need to memorize the framework of that speech to be able to present it in a coherent way. Instructors will now dedicate one class period for each speech to discuss distributive practice and explicitly teach students the steps necessary to adequately practice their speech presentations.

To improve language choices (Criterion 5), new class activities on language choices were designed for instructors. Points on the persuasive speech are now allocated for “argumentativeness” that is operationalized as language choice and tone. Instructors will be encouraged to use an entire class session in the persuasive speech unit to teach and practice argumentative tone. The workbook now includes multiple language-based activity options.

We are still exploring ways to improve delivery. Currently delivery is assessed through: vocal variety in rate, pitch, and intensity (Criterion 6); pronunciation, grammar, and articulation (Criterion 7); and physical behaviors that support the verbal message (Criterion 8). Instructors have been asked to spend more class time working with students on delivery. New exercises to improve delivery have been added to the class repository and workbook. This year, the basic course director must find more ways to help instructors effectively encourage students to distribute their practice session and increase their preparation. An immediate change is the incorporation of a guide for preparing notecards with the hopes that students will do a better job of structuring the organization of these cards, which will lead to better organization of the speech.

Assistance Needed

Continued funding for reviewers to conduct the assessment in summer is necessary.

Summary Table

Outcome	Method of Assessment	Standard	Evaluation	Action Plan
1. Recognize public speaking as a transactional process	Review of student speeches for competence.	Minimum score of 11.50/16 on the 8 relevant criteria.	94% of speeches passed	Revised speech assignments to stress importance of audience.
2. Demonstrate critical thinking in both the production and evaluation of spoken messages	Review of student speeches for competence.	Minimum score of 6/8 (75%) on 3 relevant criteria.	84% of speeches passed	New class activities and revised speech assignments stress critical thinking application.
3. Produce organized informative and persuasive messages	Review of sample student speeches for competence.	Minimum score of 3/4 (75%) on 2 relevant criteria.	66% of speeches passed.	Focus on teaching thesis statements as explicit arguments that tell audience who should do what.
4. Demonstrate effective extemporaneous speaking skills	Review of sample student speeches for competence.	Minimum score of 4.5/6 (75%) on 3 relevant criteria.	98% of speeches passed.	Require students to use a restricted number of notecards during presentation.